

VIRAL HEPATITIS

A word about TwinRix ®:

Twinrix® is the world's only combination vaccine that prevents both hepatitis A and B. Vaccination with Twinrix® requires a 3-shot series, over a 6 month period of time, for people 18 years of age or older.

Twinrix® has been proven highly effective. After completion of 3 doses, more than 98% of people develop antibodies against hepatitis A and B. The most common side effects of the vaccine include soreness at the vaccination site, headache, and fatigue. These effects are mild, do not require treatment, and do not last more than 48 hours.

Twinrix® should be offered to any person 18 years of age or older who presents in the STD clinic.

Twinrix® can be offered to any person 18 years of age or older who has been vaccinated for hepatitis B, but wants to be protected from hepatitis A. This causes no harm to the patient. The State will cover this expense.

Although not reportable as sexually transmitted diseases (STD) in North Carolina, the most common forms of viral hepatitis, Hepatitis A, B, and C, can all be transmitted sexually. The following information is from CDC's viral hepatitis website and provides a quick review of the three most common forms of viral hepatitis:

Hepatitis A:

Hepatitis A occurs in epidemics both nationwide and in communities. It is estimated that over 100,000 people in the United States are infected with hepatitis A virus each year. Between 11-20% of people with hepatitis A require hospitalization. Adults who become ill are often out of work for several weeks. There are approximately 100 deaths each year in the United States from hepatitis A infection. Over 1/3 of all Americans show evidence of a past hepatitis A infection. There is no chronic form of hepatitis A. Once you've had the infection, you are immune to hepatitis A and will not get it again. There is a vaccine to protect against hepatitis A.

1. Transmission:

- a. Hepatitis A virus is spread from person to person by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool of a person with hepatitis A. This is known as "fecal-oral" transmission. The virus is more easily spread in areas where there are poor sanitary conditions or where good personal hygiene is not observed. Rarely, hepatitis A can be passed through blood when injecting drug users share works (needles, syringes, cookers, cottons, etc) with someone infected with the disease.

2. Risk factors - Anyone can get hepatitis A, but the risk increases if you:

- a. Live with someone who has hepatitis A
- b. Are a man who has sex with a man
- c. Have more than one sex partner
- d. Have unprotected anal, oral, or vaginal sex
- e. Use illegal street drugs and engage in high risk sexual behavior
- f. Share your cigarettes or marijuana joints with others
- g. Share your works (needles, syringes, cottons, cookers) with another injecting drug user
- h. Work or have a child in a daycare setting

- i. Have chronic liver disease
 - j. Travel to areas where sanitary conditions are poor
3. Prevention - The best protection against hepatitis A is vaccination. It is also very important to use good sanitary practices. Always wash your hands with soap and water after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, and before preparing and eating food. If you have sex, especially with a sex partner who may have hepatitis A, you should always use a condom. Use moisture barriers to provide protection for oral sex as well as oral-anal contact (rimming). Limit the number of sex partners you have. You are more likely to get a STD if you have more than one partner. Avoid mixing alcohol or other drugs with sexual activities. They can lead to unsafe sex. Avoid sharing works such as needles, syringes, cottons, and cookers. If you do share, reduce your risk by disinfecting syringes with bleach.

Hepatitis B:

It is estimated that about 240,000 Americans contract hepatitis B each year. One out of 20 people in the United States will get hepatitis B during their life. There are an estimated 1.25 million chronically infected Americans. About 5,000 persons die each year from liver disease related to chronic hepatitis B. The hepatitis B virus can survive at least 7 days outside the body and is 100 times more infectious than HIV. There is a vaccine to protect against hepatitis B.

Transmission:

Hepatitis B is spread by direct contact with blood or body fluids from a hepatitis B infected person.

1. From sex - hepatitis B virus can be transmitted through semen, vaginal fluids, and saliva. You can get hepatitis B from vaginal, oral, or anal sex. If your sex partner has hepatitis B, you are at risk to get it also. Having sex without a condom increases the risk. Having more than one sexual partner also increases the risk.
2. From blood - you may get hepatitis B if you are exposed to the blood of a person infected with hepatitis B. The virus can get into the body through cuts, open sores, or other moist openings like the mouth or the vagina. You can also get hepatitis B by sharing any type of needle, including needles for tattoos, body piercing, or drugs, and from drug "works", such as cookers, cottons, and water.

Risk Factors - Anyone can get hepatitis B, but the risk increases if you:

1. Have unprotected sex
2. Have more than one sex partner
3. Are a man who has sex with a man
4. Have another STD
5. Are an injection drug user and share needles (works)
6. Live with someone who has hepatitis B
7. Have been incarcerated
8. Work in health care in contact with blood and blood products

Prevention:

The best protection against hepatitis B is vaccination. If you have sex, always use a condom. Limit your number of sex partners. The risk of contracting a STD increases if you have more than one partner. Avoid mixing alcohol and drugs with sexual activities. They can lead to unsafe sex. If you inject drugs, avoid sharing needles or works. If you do share, thoroughly bleach needles and works before use. Cover open wounds and sores to avoid transmission of blood. Never share razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers, or anything that could have blood on it.

Hepatitis C:

Currently there are over 4 million people who test positive for hepatitis C in the United States. Of these, about 2.7 million have chronic hepatitis C. Hepatitis C has been called the "silent epidemic" because most people have no symptoms and do not know they are infected. Hepatitis C develops into a chronic infection in 75-85% of those infected. Like chronic hepatitis B, if left untreated the chronic form of hepatitis C has a greater chance of developing into cirrhosis, liver cancer, or even liver failure. Liver failure due to chronic hepatitis C is the leading cause of liver transplants in the United States. Each year, an estimated 8,000-10,000 people die as the result of chronic hepatitis C liver disease. That number is expected to triple in the next decade as more cases of hepatitis C are diagnosed.

Transmission:

Hepatitis C is spread by direct contact with blood containing the virus. Anyone who comes in contact with infected blood or instruments/needles is at risk of acquiring hepatitis C.

Risk Factors:

Anyone can get hepatitis C, but the risk increases if you:

1. Are an injecting drug user and share needles (works)
2. Had a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before 1992
3. Are a hemodialysis patient
4. Are an infant born to a hepatitis C infected mother
5. Are a healthcare worker with a known exposure to infected blood
6. Have gotten multiple tattoos and/or piercings with unsterilized needles and equipment
7. Have unprotected sex with multiple partners or engage in violent, rough sex which produces blood

Prevention:

There is no vaccine against hepatitis C. Therefore, the best way to avoid hepatitis C is to avoid contact with infected blood. More specifically, never share needles or equipment if you inject drugs. Don't share razors, toothbrushes, or household items that can be contaminated with infected blood. Cover all open wounds and sores to prevent transmission. Use a latex condom every time you have sex if you are not in a long-term relationship with a single partner. While sexual transmission of hepatitis C is rare, using condoms will help protect the non-infected partner from hepatitis C and both partners from sexually transmitted diseases (STD). Lastly, always wear gloves if there is potential contact with infected blood.